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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: RUSSIAN VIEW OF SEPTEMBER 17 GENEVA TALKS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Susan Elliott for reasons 1
.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary. MFA 4th CIS Deputy Director Dvinyanin told us that the status question was the biggest obstacle for progress in the September 17 Geneva talks. Russia rejected the co-chairs' drafts in the security working group, as they did not proceed from the starting point of Russian troops and EU monitors guaranteeing security on either side of the administrative boundary lines. The only role Russia saw for the OSCE and UN was in the Incident Prevention Mechanisms (IPRMs), which could be expanded to cover a wider range of issues. However, the IPRMs, like the Geneva talks, could not be expected to produce decisions, instead only serving to reduce tensions and make possible a dialog between the parties. Signing non-use of force agreements between Georgia and the breakaway regions was Russia's top priority now, while DFM Karasin later said stopping the "remilitarization" of Georgia was another priority. Dvinyanin welcomed the co-chairs' intent to redraft a document submitted to the humanitarian working group under consideration of all sides' views. Taken together, Russia appears to be emphasizing activities that the USG does not participate in (monitors, IPRMs). End Summary.

Regions' Status

12. (C) MFA 4th CIS Department Deputy Director Alexei Dvinyanin told us September 23 that the status question for South Ossetia and Abkhazia was the greatest problem during the September 17 Geneva Talks, in part due to the breakaway regions' linkage of the status question to the return of IDPs. Russia had no intention of prevailing upon the regions in this regard, as the regions' position on status was the same as Russia's.

Working Group on Security

13. (C) Dvinyanin said that the substance of the draft document the co-chairs had submitted to the Working Group on security contained many unacceptable points, including the unexplained term "separation of forces" and references to restricted armament zones as well as demilitarized zones. Although Russia had made similar proposals in the OSCE and UN before, the West had opposed them, and now Russia's suggestions were "off the table." According to Dvinyanin, Russia no longer had any interest in an OSCE or UN presence in Georgia proper, and concurred with the Abkhaz and South Ossetians views that international forces on their territory were unwelcome, even if the regions might have stated the opposite earlier. Instead, Russia would now only negotiate

from the starting point of Russian troops providing stability and security in the regions, and the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) doing the same in Georgia proper.

Incident Prevention Mechanisms

¶4. (C) Dvinyanin said that the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) were now the only means Russia foresaw for UN or OSCE engagement in Georgia. However, their representatives could not be based in Georgia, but would have to fly in from Vienna or Geneva.

¶5. (C) Despite the agreement in Geneva on the usefulness of the IPRMs for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Dvinyanin conceded that they were not very productive. He blamed the EU for this, saying it remained inflexible regarding the chairmanship and the languages of the meetings.

¶6. (C) Still, Russia considered the IPRMs to be useful, if they led to the reduction of tensions, exchange of information, and discussion of issues. Dvinyanin urged that the IPRMs be developed further to allow a much wider range of issues to be discussed. The mechanisms could not be expected to produce decisions, however.

Non-Use of Force Agreements

MOSCOW 00002446 002 OF 003

¶7. (C) Calling the signing of non-use of force agreements (NUFs) between Georgia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia Russia's top priority, Dvinyanin welcomed that the co-chairs had agreed to rewrite their submitted draft NUF. The "deadlock" that Russia's rejection of the first draft caused lay in that the co-chairs envisioned Russia as a party to an NUF, while Russia insisted it was a mediator.

¶8. (C) Dvinyanin said the Georgian delegation during the talks might have hinted at flexibility with regard to the NUF, but had been unclear about linking the signing of the NUFs to acceptance of international forces in the breakaway regions, and never explicitly offered to sign NUFs with the regions.

Working Group on Humanitarian Issues

¶9. (C) Dvinyanin called the draft document on IDP return submitted by the co-chairs to the Working Group on humanitarian issues unacceptable, but praised the co-chairs' willingness to redraft the document based on all sides' contributions. He noted as one problem that the South Ossetian proposal from September 17 spoke of the return of South Ossetian IDPs dating back to 1989, while the co-chairs' draft only addressed Georgian IDPs.

¶10. (C) Noting that IDP return was of lesser importance to Russia, as there were no Russian IDPs in Georgia, Dvinyanin said Russia mainly cared that the international standards of voluntariness, safety, and dignity be upheld in any agreement found.

Tone and Outlook

¶11. (C) Dvinyanin criticized the co-chairs for submitting draft documents only one day before the meetings began, robbing the Russian delegation of any chance to discuss the proposals interagency. That "impolite and unhelpful" procedure caused Russia's hostile reactions in the working

groups, Dvinyanin said.

¶12. (C) Dvinyanin accused the Georgians of creating a bad atmosphere in the talks, by refusing to accept any Russian contribution, and by using such rhetoric as "occupation," "illegal military presence," and the construction of "tens of military bases" by Russia, a highly inflated number according to Dvinyanin. He acknowledged that South Ossetian participants used unconstructive language, but said they only used sharp rhetoric in retaliation when Georgia referred to their leadership as "separatists" or a "proxy government."

¶13. (C) Dvinyanin went on to say he felt Georgia had no interest in achieving concrete results in Geneva, and was actively placing obstacles in progress' path. However, he lauded the U.S. delegation's "quiet and constructive" approach, which helped reduce tensions.

¶14. (C) Dvinyanin closed by saying he remained pessimistic the Geneva talks would produce real results, but optimistic that continued talks would be a tension-reducing and trust-building measure. He considered that the talks might at best produce non-obligatory recommendations on yet-to-be determined issues.

Public statements

¶15. (C) In a September 18 announcement drafted by Dvinyanin (protect), the MFA said that the "tense" discussions in the working groups showed that Georgia did not intend to work constructively and instead sought to restore its territorial integrity by force. Dvinyanin explained that recent remarks by the former Georgian Defense Minister and by Georgian President Saakashvili had in part also prompted this view.

¶16. (U) In a press conference immediately after the talks, Russian DFM Karasin said Russia would make stopping the "remilitarization" of Georgia a priority and advocated the signing of NUFs. He credited the Russian troops' presence in the regions for the reduction in tensions there and praised the EUMM's role in Georgia proper.

MOSCOW 00002446 003 OF 003

Comment

¶17. (C) Russia's insistence on using only the EUMM as observers in Georgia proper, advocacy for expanding the scope of the EUMM-led IPRMs, and reduction of the Geneva talks to a trust-building discussion forum add up to the near exclusion of the United States from activities in Georgia.
Rubin